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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001229

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/15/2020

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SAYS SHE NEEDS TO FIND WAY TO STOP  
ANTI-CONVERSION BILL

REF: COLOMBO 1169

Classified By: Amb. J. Lunstead for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: In a conversation with the Ambassador, President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga expressed her surprise at the gazetting of a Government drafted anti-conversion bill and indicated she would try to find a way to stop the bill from moving forward. In response to the bill's gazetting on June 24 (Reftel), the Catholic Archbishop of Colombo told the Ambassador that the Catholic Church is preparing to file a case in the Supreme Court as soon as the bill is officially introduced in Parliament. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) At a farewell dinner for the Netherlands Ambassador hosted by President Kumaratunga, Ambassador Lunstead asked President Kumaratunga for her reaction to the June 24 gazetting of the government's anti-conversion bill. With an annoyed look on her face, President Kumaratunga said: "Ratnasiri told me he would not move ahead with the bill, and then he did it anyway. I will have to find a way to kill it." (Note: Ratnasiri Wickremanayake is the Minister of Buddhist Affairs, the Ministry in the Government that drafted the anti-Conversion bill. End Note.) Ambassador asked how the President could do that, and she replied that she did not know, but would have to find a way.

3. (SBU) In a conversation on a different occasion, Catholic Archbishop of Colombo told the Ambassador that the Catholic Church was readying its legal team to file a case in the Supreme Court as soon as the bill was officially introduced in Parliament. (Note: In the Sri Lankan system, the Supreme Court rules on the constitutionality of a bill when it is introduced into Parliament, not after it becomes law. End Note.)

4. (C) COMMENT: As unlikely as it seems, the President's comments seem to confirm our earlier suspicion that the Buddhist Affairs Minister has taken this action on his own, and apparently in direct contravention of what he had promised the President. END COMMENT.  
LUNSTEAD